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UNCLAS YEREVAN 001573

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EUR FOR A/S FRIED, A/DAS JFOX, ACE/TADAMS AND CACEN/KWITMER  
ECA FOR VOLVIS/LWEBER AND LMAKHOLM  
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR KOZAK  
AID FOR ACTING ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR LUTEN (E&E)  
FROM AMBASSADOR EVANS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ARMENIAN SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT VISITING WASHINGTON

(SBU) Sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

1. (SBU) Artur Baghdasarian, the young, energetic and charismatic Speaker of the Armenian National Assembly, is flying to Washington today for a ten-day visit including a seven-day Voluntary Visitor program that has been a joint effort by the Office of International Visitors, Embassy Yerevan, the National Democratic Institute, the Armenian Legislative Strengthening Program funded by USAID, and the Armenian-American Assembly, as well as some private individuals. Although the timing of his visit is not the best, straddling Labor Day, this will be Baghdasarian's first real exposure to Washington, and we hope it will have the effect of confirming this young political leader's confidence in democracy and his Western orientation.

2. (SBU) Baghdasarian claims to be the youngest parliamentary speaker in Europe. In our experience, he "gets it" on democracy, and has spoken out repeatedly and fearlessly on issues of concern to Armenian voters. As the leader of the smallest party (Orinats Yerkir or "Country of Law") in the three-party governing coalition, he has occupied an important mediatory position and has used it not only to his own advantage, but for the greater good. In the current drawn-out duel between President Kocharian and the opposition over the constitutional amendments, he has managed to keep lines of communication open in both directions, even drawing praise from some opposition members. He also has been a leader in pressing for more normal relations with both Turkey and Azerbaijan, and maintains cordial relations with the speakers of both those countries' parliaments. Earlier this year he received a traveling member of the Turkish parliament in the face of criticism by the local media.

3. (SBU) Baghdasarian has been open to advice from both the Armenian Legislative Strengthening Program, and from NDI, both funded by USAID. He was helpful to us in the parliamentary debate over the non-combatant unit Armenia sent to Iraq at the beginning of this year. He will be traveling, at our suggestion, with his accomplished English-speaking wife, Anna. We urge those with whom Artur Baghdasarian is scheduled to meet to try to keep those appointments if at all possible, and to engage with this young and personable political leader who, we think, should have a bright future in the Republic of Armenia. Baghdasarian has recently been working on his English, but is not yet fully fluent.

4. (SBU) On Capitol Hill, Baghdasarian is scheduled to meet with Speaker Hastert; however, we have been warned that that meeting may well fall through. He is also scheduled to speak at CSIS and to visit the offices of the Millennium Challenge Corporation.

5. Baghdasarian's bio is available on Embassy Yerevan's new classified website at [www.state.sgov/p/eur/yerevan](http://www.state.sgov/p/eur/yerevan).

EVANS